

Transcript for Narrative Analysis

Having been brought up in a household where science and religion were both part of daily life, it was easy for me to bring the two beliefs together. This co-existence of science and religion continued at our school where both chapel services and science are part of the daily experience. Thus, for me the notion of God became all-encompassing including science and the knowledge constructed through its procedures. At the school, I liked very much and did well in all my subjects, including the sciences biology, chemistry, and physics. Besides sciences, I also took a keen interest in philosophy, poetry, and fine art all of which were part of my course work towards graduation. I was one of the chapel wardens, and member of the chapel choir. In my conversations with Michael, the senior author, I came to know that my discourse could be labeled "social constructivist." While this might be surprising, I do have a significant spiritual-religious life. These labels, however, like so many, do not express my specific discourse at the time of the study. (I will elaborate on science and religion below.) My contribution also presented us with a problem which we had to resolve as we wrote this article. I often felt tempted to change or add to my earlier written and spoken statements. Michael, on the other hand, felt that the article should be about high school students' discourse rather than a story of my changing discourse in the process of our inquiry. This is a different story which I would like to tell in another place. So we decided to present my views as we reconstructed them together from the essays, formal interviews, personal notes, and informal conversations at the time I attended Grade 12.

Science is a language game. It allows us to talk about the world in community of knowers which shares a common language. This language allows us to create tools—concepts and theories—to talk about this world, predict and explain events, and thus create our knowledge of this world. We are now forced to ask ourselves what shape do these tools and truths take and how are they used by us? The answer takes us to the beginning of one of my essays where I stated that it is "with words, with sounds, all joyful, playful and obscene" on which scientific knowledge is based. The language we create and use to describe our observations becomes the tool itself. By changing the language we not only change the law and principles science is stating but we also change a previously accepted truth and effectively make a new one. Thus, it is language and the way in which we choose to define the phenomena we observe that is at the core of our knowledge; it is through these words that we arrive at the images and ideas that allow us to predict and explain our observations. This holds true for everything in our lives, it is through our language that we communicate our ideas, thoughts, and feelings, and it is also through them that we are able to learn through the recreation of our perceptions within our minds.

I find myself asking continually, does not the way in which we choose to describe what is occurring in fact create our reality? Now that we have progressed in science to a point that we are determining the relationship of things that are no longer visible to us and are at times almost unimaginable, it seems that reality becomes what man makes it. The way in which we describe things and think they are becomes what is real for us, until a time that a new and better way is thought of to replace the old; this in turn becomes our new reality. But this language has not only such a descriptive quality to be used in understanding the phenomenal world, but can also be used reflexively, to think about our thinking, language, and knowledge. It lets us conceive of our knowledge as being constructed, and as having a precarious relationship with that which it describes, including language itself.... Although I believe that the world is constructed, a construction mediated by language, figural models, and perceptions, I do not consider myself a solipsist. I believe that there is a world in which we are thrown, a world which we sense as experientially real, about which have no doubt.

In contrast to the personal experience of God, there are also the socially constructed organized religions and their practices. Because of their negotiated character these practices vary across denominations and religions.

Religion and God are part of a spiritual realm of human beings. Our experience with God is always a personal one. This experience has an ontology similar to the reality of material objects and events phenomena: it is experientially real. But in addition, this personal experience is also the only source of truth and permits me to make truly ethical and moral decision. The experience of God is a spiritual one which includes all the wonders of human existence; it includes all those things like love, beauty, truth, and goodness which cannot be explained by science, and may have no place in science. I mean, just look at intangible things, like love and beauty. I think that equates to God for me. You do not understand why, but you know that these things exist. You know certain things are beautiful, and you know you love certain things, but you cannot explain why, you just do. It's like beauty: if you are sitting at night down by the lake, having a beer or a smoke or whatever. All of a sudden the sun goes down, and the colors appear in the sky and on the horizon. It is beautiful, that is IT, that is beauty, you cannot say why, you can't define it... In my view, God is not a material or physical being, and cannot be perceived or described in any way. Whenever I think of God I get a picture of nothing, but try to think of nothing, and that's God, and that's: well think of nothing that's as close as you can get to everything, and that gives you God... If you are infinite then there is no such thing as change, but is all-encompassing, so we can't apply change to infinite things, I mean that's like saying is God good-looking, or is God plain, or, I don't know tall, we can't apply the term to infinite things... The essence is that things came from God, and they are part of God, God doesn't have two hands, doesn't have a face, doesn't have a mind, God just is.

I believe that my non-literal understanding of the Biblical creation story interfaces with my conception of an immaterial God that revealed itself to Moses as an entity without image. God's presence is immanent in the universe as creation, and evolution is the process by which the world is continually transformed. Although in this view, God does not actively intervene in the physical world, God and the associated spirituality are resources for me to deal with ethical problems. As a scientist or a doctor, I will draw on these resources within myself where I relate to God. I find that when we have problems, we draw on our religion not on science. Science is there just for man to use, but there is not the energy in it: like when we have problems and difficulties we draw on our religious and spiritual sides, and when we have a problem we look at our religious side. We are not looking for a textbook, we do not read a book about it: we look into ourselves.

Science in and of itself does not have an ethic, it is value neutral ready for man to use for the betterment of man. To overcome this lacunae of value neutrality in decisions involving man and the world, we have to use our personal, religious and/or spiritual resources for dealing with the ethical and moral dimensions of decision making. Because of its personal nature, this spirituality leads to an ethic which is very case based and differs from decision maker to decision maker. Euthanasia and abortion need to be case related, that is the only way that decisions would be made for one person on a case. As a doctor, I will know before an operation. I can see both sides, all the arguments, and I ride the fence pretty much to all of them; if I disagree with an abortion then I would not perform it; if I disagreed with euthanasia then I would not perform it. I would make a decision case by case because these are not black and white issues. Just like with genetic engineering, it is not a black and white subject. Here too, every decision would be very situational. I mean, it is totally situational, both are prime examples, with huge gray areas and I think for me I would be very internally very case related.